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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that curriculum theorists replace abstract language with more descriptive terms in order to achieve productive criticism, and it examines issues inherent in such a change. American educational discourse, traditionally focused on technical rationales, encourages theorizing, but a descriptive, aesthetic rationale might facilitate better an understanding of the immediacy of the curriculum experience. Similarities between curricula and "works of art" strengthen this innovative idea. Inherent assumptions, which must be verified empirically, involve (1) appropriateness of considering curriculum and a work of art in the same context, (2) educational significance of curriculum materials' aesthetic qualities, (3) ability of a critic's perception to illuminate perceptions of others who encounter the work, (4) capacity of curriculum material quality to indicate quality of the experience, (5) similarity of critic's and student's experiences, (6) validity of artistic terms when applied to curriculum materials, and (7) identification of critical aesthetic terms beyond those derived from art criticism. Accuracy of critical perceptions must be studied. This new approach can be justified if more practical attempts at aesthetic criticism are made, if insights are found useful in practical situations, and if audience judgment has an influence on quality of school experience. (AV)

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The Application of Aesthetic Criticism to Curriculum Materials: Arguments and Issues

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by

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(a paper developed for presentation at the AERA Convention, San Francisco, April 1976)

Introduction

This paper addresses the problem of developing an appropriate language [redacted] for talking about problems in the curriculum field. It outlines the argument that the tools of discourse which education has borrowed from the paradigm of the sciences is a language which seeks commonalities, moves toward generalization, and encourages the abstractions inherent in theory. The pervasive need in the field of education to develop generalizable and replicable solutions to problems defined in those terms has, according to this argument, certain necessary constraints on what we select to examine as curricular problems or issues. This technical paradigm, ordered by the standards by which causality can be determined, necessarily overlooks the peculiar and unique qualities of the very immediate and "lived-in" phenomenon which is the curriculum. It encourages, in a sense, an elevation of theory at the expense of real and vivid contact with the practical. This imbalance is critical to our understanding of the subject-matter of the discipline of "curriculum," for it is (after all) the immediate day-to-day qualitative experience of a curriculum which most regularly and pervasively reaches the student. To focus on outcomes and achievement only is to see but one dimension of the experience.

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One response to this imbalance is to turn to the disciplines of aesthetics and aesthetic criticism, whose traditions and tools of discourse are deliberately geared toward a sensitivity to the unique qualities of artifacts which structure human experience. Huebner (1966) calls this tradition, when applied to education, the "aesthetic rationale," and a strong argument has been built, by a number of educators, for developing such an orientation within education. This paper summarizes the major points in that argument, but the emphasis here is on some of the issues and questions that are endemic to the application of aesthetic criticism to curricula. It is hoped that by identifying some of the substantive issues in curriculum criticism, those involved in developing this approach can be sensitive to the qualifying conditions involved in transposing aesthetic criticism to the context of curricular problems. Eventually, if curriculum criticism is to have conceptual and practical power, these issues must be addressed directly. The primary goal of this paper, then, is to outline the problem and define some questions, which may help curriculum theorists, and others who are one or more steps removed from the practical context of curriculum-making or teaching in the schools, to come closer to the vivid practical qualities of the ultimate subject-matter of the discipline. If the paper allows us to re-think our biases about what is salient in defining a curriculum, it has amply served its purpose.

The Argument: Theory and the Practical in Curriculum

The wide-ranging nature of the curriculum field, as a discipline, seems to encourage the development of theory and of conceptual superstructures. Discourse about curriculum in the professional journals, at any rate, appears to be quite comfortable and prolific at the level of theory-building, models, and meta-language. There are both implicit and explicit reasons for this. The susceptibility to theorizing and systematic formulations is due in part to

an apparent need to define and bring to order to the very diverse subject-matter of a field whose very label (what is "a curriculum," anyway, and what is it made of?) can refer to courses, to whole sequences of study, to content areas, or to the academic discipline which attempts to oversee all of these. It is due in part to the fact that, for all this diversity, it is possible to identify consistent sets of variables and to find an underlying structure in curriculum issues or in the process of curriculum making. Schwab (1973), Walker (1971), Duncan and Frymier (1967), Goodlad and Richter (1966), for example, have persuasively identified various underlying orders within the confusing complexities of curriculum making. And in part the attention to theory reflects a long-standing concern with the imprecision of the language of the discipline and a need to develop an appropriate language of discourse (Huebner 1966, Macdonald 1965, 1971, Mann 1969; Caswell 1950; Bantock 1961). Furthermore, meta-language and theoretical discourse serve a purpose for those considering curriculum problems at a level removed from the practical realm of teaching. As frameworks for describing the larger context of a "curriculum," they can sensitize curriculum workers to the interrelationships in educational issues and processes.

There is a limit, however, to the usefulness of theorizing and generalizing in so practical field as curriculum; the seductiveness of theory and commonalities can easily divert our attention from the really crucial issues involving particular and unique problems of curriculum. The tendency reflects, Schwab argues (1969) a "flight upward" from the proper practical concerns of the discipline, a shift from using the principles of curriculum analysis and development to talking about them. And in the curriculum field especially, which seeks to produce good practical products and has a constituency of practitioners who are ultimately affected by deliberations about curriculum, this kind of

flight upward can hamper not only our practice but our thinking about practice.

(It is interesting to acknowledge at this point that a paper with so conceptual a focus as this, talking about the problem of talking about principles, is in many ways the epitome of this flight into meta-language. But the argument developed here leads to some very practical approaches. It is perhaps symptomatic of the state of the art that theoretical discourse about problems in theory seems an appropriate jumping-off point for getting us back in touch with the practical).

Theory, Schwab argues (1969), pertains to the regularities among the things it subsumes; it abstracts generalizations from the particulars. Even in curriculum, theory involves sometimes very refined, elegant and persuasive representations of the phenomena at hand; it deliberately helps to make sense out of apparent chaos. It shows us the commonalities and offers principles by which to explain and order them. And all of this, to a certain extent, is useful in a field which, it seems, is still in the process of defining and justifying itself to other more established branches of education (the "organizational structure" of the field, as Schwab points out, is weak).

But productive curriculum discourse--that which deals with real curricula and their particular, unique, complex problems--deals in practical questions; ultimately curriculum discourse must always be brought to bear on concrete particular cases. And no general theory about the components of "curriculum modules", however elegantly argued (Duncan and Frymier 1967) can really help us deal with, for example, for the particular qualities of a unit on early explorations of the Great Plains. A discipline which relies heavily on theory and model-building to define the subject-matter of its field lacks the tools or language with which to portray--and therefore, to react to, revise, deliberate about--particular curricula that the theories purport to subsume.

How then, can those of us who are prone to theorizing, who use it productively in other contexts, and who are also involved in developing curricula, come to have a more immediate sense of the practical nature of our craft? How can we talk about curricula and their problems in a language which reflects their unique and peculiar qualities?

It is important to realize that the problem of a perhaps too-pervasive tendency to generalize and to seek refuge in theory only reflects the constraints in our ways of thinking about educational problems generally. Our definitions of educational problems, themselves, are couched in a rhetoric which by definition seeks laws and principles as its outcome; it is a language which necessarily discounts the particular in order to seek generalizable solutions. The confusion concerning the appropriate forms of inquiry for the field can be phrased in terms of the different modes of perceiving, or the different "rationales", through which practical educational problems are approached. Different rationales provide different tools for identifying problems and for communicating what is learned.

Huebner's (1966) paper on curricular language and the value systems underlying it is perhaps the most comprehensive statement on the alternative languages available to the curriculum field. He identifies five possible "rationales", or modes of valuing educational phenomena. These are:

1. Technical. "Current curricular ideology reflects, almost completely, a technical value system. It has a means-ends rationality that approaches an economic model. End states, end products, or objectives are specified as carefully and as accurately as possible....Major concerns for the curricular worker are the mobilization of material and human resources to produce these ends." (pp. 14-15)

2. Political. This value system acknowledges that the educator does have a position of power and control, in influencing others, and that his or her continued support depends on a careful exercise of power. All educational activity is valued politically.

3. Scientific. Scientific valuing seeks to maximize attainment of information or knowledge for the teacher or educator. Scientific valuing is a necessary form of valuing and continually seeks more information about educational phenomena.

4. Aesthetic. "The aesthetic valuing of educational activity is often completely ignored....Scientific and technical values are more highly prized consciously and convertly. Valued aesthetically, educational activities would be viewed as having symbolic or aesthetic meanings." (p. 17)

5. Ethical. "The concern of this value category is not on the significance of the educational act for the other ends, or the rationalization of other values, but the value of the educational act per se." (p. 19)

Historically and currently, Huebner argues, educational discourse in America has focused on the technical, the political and the scientific rationales. One or another of these three perspectives historically has dominated both the rhetoric of education and the actual functioning of the schools at any given period.

Although our traditional emphasis on the technical rationale is, in many respects, a useful mode of thought in curriculum, a number of critics (Huebner 1966, Macdonald 1965, 1971, Eisner 1972, Mann 1969, Westbury 1970, Shulman 1970) have argued that the language of technique and science (and its syntax of empirical proof, which education has borrowed from the social sciences and ultimately from the "hard" sciences) (Shulman 1970) is a constraint on our perspective on educational problems. By seeking causal relationships, this paradigm limits our perceptions to those questions which can be phrased in terms of causality and generalization. The technical rationale constrains our ability to conceptualize relevant variables, to evaluate creative efforts, and generally to see the less systematic and more evanescent qualities of schooling. It is a rationale which demands principles and predictability, and a standard of replicability; it encourages theory.

Within this general paradigm of educational research, the curriculum can easily be regarded as a means to a (usually predetermined) end; educational quality comes to be defined largely in terms of curriculum outcomes, in turn defined in terms of achievement. We come to look for devices, methods, characteristics which can be generalized to other curricula in order to produce the appropriate measurable imporvements. And in doing so, the special non-repeated qualities of a given curriculum may be down played in deliberations about it.

And yet, as Mann (1969) so powerfully argued, every curriculum which every child works through is a real, immediate, and "lived-in" thing every moment of the school day. It influences both students and teachers, it is part of the environment which molds the child's experience of schooling, it provides some of the most significant (or at least the most obvious) "brackets" by which a child's day is defined. Whatever cognitive-growth effects it may be having, it is <u>also</u> inescapably a part of the child's experience--pervasive, personal, reactable to. Like anything which puts boundaries around the normal flow of experience, and defines it in a way that can be noticed and appreciated, a curriculum (and by implication, a set of curriculum materials) can be considered (in Dewey's terms, 1958) potentially an <u>aesthetic</u> experience. And, as Mann (1969) and Eisner (1972) argue, the educational tradition which values curricula in terms of outcome, and looks for commonalities that apply across variables, is a tradition which is unable to fully grasp and appreciate the nonrepeated qualities that influence the experience they offer.

Huebner (1966) proposes the aesthetic rationale as a supplement to the technical mode of valuing educational experience, an argument which is reflected in the writings of other educators. The proposition that the tools of aesthetic criticism be applied to educational settings has been made by Mann (1969), Westbury (1970), Eisner (1972), who argue that the curriculum can legitimately

be considered as a work of art, and analyzed in terms appropriate to a work of art. For Mann, this would allow us to focus on the "lived-in" and immediate experience offered by a curriculum; it would allow us to capture some of the ineffable and peculiar quality that any curriculum presents to each user, and to account in this way for the ethical effect which any curriculum has by virtue of its influence on people. Eisner's argument takes this farther: an aesthetic approach to curriculum would provide us with a different and possibly more fruitful avenue toward curriculum evaluation. To see a curriculum as a work of art, and to judge it in those terms, is to assess it in ways that educational research has heretofore not allowed but which might tap its more enduring and more pervasive effects.

Some similarities between curricula and "works of art" may be helpful to clarify the argument. The more evident of these are the following: 1) both are products of human construction; they are "artifactual"; 2) both are a means of communication between the originator (developer or artist) and an audience (users or museum-goers); 3) both are a transformation of the knowledge of the originator into a form that is accessible to the audience (Langer's view of art as a transformation of non-discursive knowledge into a physical medium articulates this view most clearly) (1957); 4) both are, in different senses, the product of a problem-solving process. Ecker's (1966) description of artistic work, as a series of meeting and resolving problems of form and expression, has a clear parallel in the kinds of deliberations engaged in by curriculists in determining the form and content of a curriculum (Walker 1971). 5) Both depend for their meaning on the encounter with the audience: both provide a situation in which the audience's response is invited and virtually demanded. 6) Both provide a set of "brackets" or boundaries to the audience's experience: both curricula and works of art present selections from the total realm of experience, organized and formulated in a way that structures one's perception

of that experience. Both do this deliberately. 7) When they succeed in capturing the attention of the audience (by intrinsic interest, among paintings in a museum, or too often by assignation, for the users in a school), both can provoke strong reactions in the audience. Neither is very often received neutrally. 8) Both can be placed within a tradition of history and style change; both are participants in an ongoing development of style and a cumulation of tradition. Both may be either revolutionary or superseded, or, in time, both. 9) Both invite criticism and assessment.

Aesthetic criticism is a long-established mode of descriptive portrayal. Whatever else it may cover (the artist's intentions or historical context, biographical information, social history, or whatever), art criticism necessarily demands a descriptive scrutiny of the work itself. In arguing a judgment, the critic creates a vivid descriptive image of what seems most salient in the subject at hand (a reproduction is not enough: the critic uses analytical description as a means of selecting and presenting the evidence to support a judgment). Criticism has a long tradition by which it has evolved standards and criteria for the assessments it offers. One of the most stringent (though always implicit) standards is the one which Pepper (1945) defines as "structural corroboration". According to this standard, the evidence which a critic offers in support of a judgment must be internally coherent; it must hang together on its own, much like a legal defense (which attempts to re-create a nonrepeated past event in a way supporting a particular interpretatation of that event) must be internally coherent. (This is significantly, in contrast to the usual standard of verification in the sciences and education, that of "multiplicative corroboration", where an observation or measurement is either repeated many times or made by numerous judges.) And it must be not only internally coherent but also verifiable by any other observer who looks at the work -- it must not be so arcane or abstract that the description can't be tested against visible reality. It must be, in Eisner's words, "referen-

ially adequate" (197).

Thus, the art critic, operating under standards of the internal coherence and referential adequacy of a critical description, is concerned with transforming the plastic qualities of visible work into the language of ordinary discourse, creating through description a verbal image which is evocative, suggestive, vivid, and verifiable. Thus the critic, (in Kozloff's terms) (1968) "renders" the work of art into ordinary language, connecting with the less trained perceptions of the reader. The critic, by focusing on the experience created by a work, provides a kind of bridge between the work of art and the reader. "The function of criticism", as Dewey has said (1958), "is the re-education of perception". And if the tools of art criticism help us to see qualities in a work of art that we might otherwise have overlooked, the tools of criticism should similarly help us to more clearly see the unique qualities of curriculum materials.

Aesthetic criticism, in this sense, has not heretofore been applied to curriculum materials, but a number of frameworks and theoretical orientations to this practical question have been proposed. Westbury (1970) argued the analogy between literary criticism and curriculum evaluation and Kelly (1973) attempted to explicate that relationship. Kaufman (1970) proposed a set of aesthetic categories to be applied in examining educational phenomena, and Greer (1974) has laid the groundwork for criticizing teaching as an art form, using the questions inherent in the different "world views" identified by Pepper (1945). In an earlier work (Vallance, 1975), I proposed a set of "guidelines" for the critical description of curriculum materials, based on the techniques of vivid description used in the criticism of paintings, and applied them to these sets of curriculum materials.

Endemic in all of the current efforts to develop the aesthetic rationale are a number of inescapable issues. The justifiable failure to deal directly with many of these issues may mean that productive debate on the role of curriculum criticism will lack sharpness and focus; it surely does mean that the conceptual underpinnings of this very practical approach to curriculum can't yet be fully understood or argued to skeptics.

It is in an effort to gain some conceptual clarity about criticism in education -- and thereby to lend strength to the arguments -- that the remainder of this paper is devoted to describing some of the major issues involved in this approach.

Problems and Issues in Curriculum Criticism

The application of art criticism techniques to curriculum materials--and indeed the whole concept of "curriculum criticism" -- is new to the literature of education. There is, therefore, no established tradition against which to evaluate the appropriateness of any given argument, no context in which to assess examples of curriculum criticism in their own terms. This lack of an evaluative context has at least two important implications for the development of a discipline of criticism: it frees the critic to explore the relationship between criticism and curriculum from a number of different angles, but it also demands that the deliberations about the appropriateness of criticism disclose as many pertinent questions as possible so as to facilitate further investigations.

The real power of curriculum criticism will depend on many things. It will depend on the elaboration of different approaches and emphases to fit the very diverse and conflicting conceptions of curriculum currently held by educators (though

some of these will surely be more amenable to criticism than others) (Eisner and Vallance 1974). It will depend on the emergence of a richly diverse set of critical perspectives and analysis of what in criticism is useful to understanding curriculum problems. It will depend on sensitizing educators to the value of the critical perspective (insofar as this is demonstrated). And all of these will depend in part on our success in resolving some of the more basic issues inherent in the aesthetic rationale.

The issues to be discussed here fall into three categories. First is a set of questions derived directly from the logical assumptions which are embedded in the argument for curriculum criticism. Secondly, there are the more specific empirical implications of some of these assumptions. Thirdly, there is a whole set of problems which reflect the dilemma of justifying this approach against others -- the question of which insights are unique to aesthetic criticism, and how these complement the more traditional ways of talking about curricula, are basic issues that demand attention at some point. This includes the Big Question -- how, practically speaking, can the aesthetic criticism of curriculum be expected to improve or clarify our knowledge of curriculum quality? The last section of the paper deals with this issue.

Assumptions in the Argument

The assumptions embedded in the argument for criticism are both a source of empirical questions and a guide for identifying larger issues raised by the approach. Their verification is essential if the conceptual argument presented here is to be substantiated in practice.

Assumptions in the argument include: 1) It is appropriate to consider a curriculum in the same context that one considers a work of art. It can legitimately (though temporarily, for our purposes) be isolated from the larger context of information available on it, and considered as an artifact which influences the experiences

of others. It merits scrutiny as an aesthetic object in its own terms. (Whether it is finally judged to be "aesthetic" in the popular positive sense of the term, of course, is always to be determined.) That is, a course (or, here, a set of curriculum materials) has a meaning and a significance in its own right, independent of the larger series of which it may be part or the rationale and theories that lie behind it (unless, of course, these emerge clearly in the materials themselves). 2) The aesthetic qualities of curriculum materials have an educational significance. That is, the standards by which the critic judges a set of educational materials come both from aesthetics and from a sensitivity to educational purposes and problems. Thus the perspective of educational criticism enables the critic to disclose those aesthetic qualities of the curriculum which are salient in that curriculum's influence on others, and to assess those qualities from an educational point of view. The curriculum critic connects the tradition of critical practice with educational expertise; each illuminates the other. 3) The critic's perception, verified against the curriculum materials themselves, can illuminate the perceptions of others who will encounter the work. 4) The qualities of the curriculum materials, as the constants in a curriculum (used in different settings by teachers and students of varying ability and style), are one indication of the quality of the experience itself. A description which focuses on the constant physical form of the materials can provide information that may be relevant in some way to a variety of potential users, without being limited by the constraints of particular kinds of settings. 5) The aesthetic perspective on curriculum materials, by ignoring the contextual aspects of the materials, derives its validity partly from the analogy between this perspective and the student's. That is, the critic discounts (as the student ignores) the full context of the materials: the relation of any particular set of materials to others in the school calendar,

to the goals of the developers, to the educational philosophy underlying the selection of content, and to other contextual variables are bypassed in creating a critical description. Becuase the critic's experience approximates that of the student, it can provide insights that curriculists or teachers are unable to see. 6) Artistic terms which refer to the internal structure and pervasive qualities (Dewey 1958) of a work of art are equally valid criteria when applied to curriculum materials. The qualities which determine the aesthetic effect of a painting on a viewer also determine the aesthetic satisfaction provided by curriculum materials. Therefore, it is appropriate to borrow some terms directly from the realm of artistic discourse. 7) Curriculum materials have qualities which distinguish them from the plastic arts and therefore it is appropriate to develop additional techniques and terms, beyond those derived from art criticism, in talking about curricula in aesthetic terms.

Empirical Implications

A number of important questions, subject to empirical investigation, are suggested by these assumptions. Two types of empirical questions will be discussed. These are: 1) questions referring to the assumptions underlying the argument for criticism, 2) questions referring to the accuracy of critical perceptions.

Underlying asssumptions. The assumptions underlying the approach to critical description argued here must be subjected to empirical verification if a tradition of educational criticism is to be solidly founded. Briefly summarized, the relevant empirical questions are: 1) Is it practical or illuminative to isolate curriculum materials from the larger context and consider them as a separate whole? Or does this in fact provide too little information to decision-makers? Is it more useful to try to consider the whole series in which they may be taught, or to try to account for the different educational

settings in which they may be used (different student abilities, teaching styles, community settings, etc.)? Does a critique of curriculum materials outside of this functional context demand too much interpretation by the reader to be practically helpful? 2) Do curricula which vary greatly in aesthetic qualities have correspondingly different educational impacts? (And how might this be assessed?) Do the aesthetics of a curriculum really "make a difference" to the quality of the schooling experience? 3) Do the educational critic's perceptions in fact enable other people to see qualities in the materials that they hadn't noticed before? And do these enhanced perceptions actually facilitate informed decision-making? 4) How accurately do the materials themselves reflect (or influence) the quality of the experience undergone in classroom use of the materials? How strongly do the student materials color the students' experience? Is the fact that the materials are the only real constant across many settings a sufficient argument for focusing on the materials? What else colors the experience that the students have with a given curriculum? (A teacher with whom I discussed these questions suggested that Teachers' Guides are the best indication of what the curriculum is like: Would then a critical description of the teacher's guide be practically more useful than a description of the student text? Would it come closer to capturing the flavor of the curriculum-in-use?) 5) How accurately does the critic's experience of the materials approximate that of the student? Does the critic's discounting the contextual informational aspects of the curriculum in fact allow reveal the qualities in the curriculum that are most salient to students? (An aside: would students perhaps react more favorably to the critical descriptions than teachers, who could assess them against what they know of the materials in other contexts?) 6) Are there some aesthetic qualities which are not (for any reason) appropriate to discussing curriculum materials? Alternatively, are there some aesthetic qualities

which are peculiar to curriculum and cannot be sought in discourse on art? Do users actually experience the total beginning-to-end structure of a whole set of curriculum materials, as the "curriculum as work of art" approach implies? Does past experience suggest that a treatment of individual parts, or of an incomplete sequence, might be a more appropriate approach?

Accuracy of critical perceptions. An important area of investigation will focus on the accuracy of the critic's perceptions as measured against those of adult practitioners (teachers and curriculum workers) and students using the materials -- in short, on the "referential adequacy" of the criticism. One of the strongest qualities of criticism is the analogy between the critic and the viewer -- placed in the position of confronting or experiencing a work of art (a painting, a play, dance, or educational materials), both critic and viewer have qualitative reactions to it. In the realm of art, it is the critic's "funded perception" and "informed interest" (Dewey 1958) which enhance his or her experience of the work and enables the critic to group the pervasive qualities of the work, and to communicate these aesthetic qualities in ordinary language that is accessible to the ordinary viewer.

This situation is reflected, with some changes, in the context of curriculum cricism. A significant difference is that whereas the art critic's special expertise derives from a qualitatively greater familiarity with "art" than the general public which is the audience, the curriculum critic is immersed in much the same world as the audience of the criticism. All are involved in education on a day-to-day basis, and the distance may not be as great as between art critic and general public. The curriculum critic's expertise lies partly in being able to reflect the several perspectives of the diverse audiences of the curriculum, and partly in an ability to perceive the salient qualities of the curriculum without undergoing the full semester-long experience that it actually entails for the student or teacher. The curriculum critic, then, operates from a similar

orientation and practical setting as those of the various audiences, but experiences the materials in a different way.

This view of curriculum criticism raises several questions which merit some scrutiny. They include the following: 1) How accurately can the critic prefigure the student's reactions to the "feeling" of curriculum materials? (For example, if a critic sees a particular textbook as "chaotic and loose", how likely is the student's experience of that text to be a disorganized and loosely connected one?) 2) How accurately can a critic prefigure the reaction of the teacher to the same materials? (That is, a set of course materials which seem partial or "lacking in closure" to a critic might or might not seem incomplete to the teacher when using them). 3) Is what the critic sees as a salient quality of a set of materials an accurate reflection of the quality of those materials-in-use? (Does a text which seems overly structured, weighty, or biased in some way actually come across that way in class?) 4) If not, can we specify what accounts for the difference between aesthetic impression and qualities-in-use? (Is it always teaching style which matters? What of the context of other courses in the curriculum? Or the social climate of the school? Can we assess the impact of these on curriculum-in-use?) 5) How can the critic's experience with the materials better approximate the experience of the users? What factors in the background or training of the critic enhance or diminish the sensitivity to aesthetic qualities of curricula and to the educational significance of these? (Is perceptivity heightened by an aesthetic background? by an educational generalist background? by subject-matter expertise? by teaching experience, or by variety in same? Might students in some cases be more effective critics than adults and if so how might they be trained?)

Justification

The questions as to the relative value or usefulness of the aesthetic rationale and of curriculum criticism clearly cannot begin to be settled until considerably later. But the issue of justifying curriculum criticism, in a context which is so permeated with technical/scientific paradigm will be a fascinating one.

The justification can come from at least three sources. Part of it lies in the validity of the argument presented at the beginning of this paper -- more experience and more practical attempts at curriculum criticism are required before we can know whether an aesthetic rationale actually can show us insights into educational experiences that theory necessarily disregards. The value of the insights will vary with the particular setting, of course, but for our purpose the prior question is whether criticism does provide an inroad to the unique qualities of different curricula. The argument has been made; it remains to be seen exactly how these insights differ from those available from a more technical "causal" perspective on curriculum

The second source of justification goes the next step. Assuming that criticism does provide novel insights we must also know whether these are useful in practical curricular situations. Do they help us to choose between curricula? Does the new perspective make a difference in our judgments? Does it allow us to demand more of curricular change? Is it useful to teachers, administrators, parents and students? To some of these more than others? Why? And does it really bring erstwhile curriculum theorists (myself included, and some of my best friends, too) closer to the immediate qualities of their subject matter?

Extending this line of thought still further, we must then wonder whether the refined judgments of the various audiences actually influence the quality of the experiences offered to children in school. By what standards would we

know that this curricular quality was somehow "better"? To what extent would the old criteria (achievement, retention, etc.) still apply? What new criteria are implied by the aesthetic rationale?

The argument propounded in this paper, of course, presumes a yes answer to most of the yes/no question raised above. Other arguments within the aesthetic rationale may have a different base, and will raise some different specific issues. But any argument and practical application will, I think, entail some assumptions in the argument, some implied empirical questions (related to the assumptions and to accuracy), and some issues on which the justification depends.

But in any case, the curriculum critic will be confronted by the skeptic saying "so what?" -- what does this do, beyond giving us a whole new set of variables to play with?

Certainly the whole scientific tradition in education militates against an aesthetic non-instrumental view of the components of the schooling experience. The same tradition will probably insure that curriculum criticism (and its insights) will be dealt with for a while in the context of variables and replicable objectivity. Its insights may well be subjected to the tests of multiplicative corroboration. The need for straight information -- "quantitative" and otherwise trimmed of individual interpretation -- echoes through the educational research journals and provides the standards by which new efforts are judged. Much of the usefulness of criticism in curriculum will depend on educating educators to entertain an alternative perspective. Much will also depend on developing appropriate styles of criticism and training competent and sensitive critics.

Conceivably critics could come from various sources, including the disciplines that now train curriculum generalists, subject-matter specialists, art educators, curriculum evaluators, or art criticism itself (though no

discipline specifically trains art critics). Is there any identifiable orientation which can facilitate the training of sensitive critics, well versed both in problems of aesthetics and in assessing the educational significance of aesthetic aspects of curricula? In any case, how might such critics by trained? What special predilections and skills are essential? to the task of curriculum criticism?

Conclusion: Comments on Art Criticism and Curriculum Critism

The criticism of curriculum materials, as outlined here, and the criticism of art do share some qualities which bind them inextricably together. Both provide a personal and individualized view of the work, attending to it in the isolated but complete context in which the user or viewer experience it; both attend to detail as a means of building a larger impression, and in both the use of detail focuses on relational patterns rather than individual items of information; both are selective, referring only to the most salient of the qualities which determine the work's effect on the writer; and both reflect a personal involvement with the work in question. Criticism of curricula and of are both are active, interpretive, personally involving enterprises. Both attempt to communicate the nature of that experience to an audience whose perceptions are, for whatever reason, less carefully attuned.

But they are not the same. The curriculist has a whole additional tradition of experience against which to make both incidental and deliberate comparisons, and must be prepared to defend his or her perceptions and selections on both aesthetic and educational grounds. This dual orientation of the critic defines the dimensions of the curriculum materials as perceived by the critic, for these materials may have conflicting qualities: qualities which are aesthetically appropriate may be educationally questionable, and vice versa. And

therefore the nature of judgment in the two endeavors is different also: where the judgments of art criticism may emerge from the disclosure of patterns which are intrinsically valued, the judgments of curriculum criticism must go beyond descriptive analysis and the disclosure of patterns to consider these in the context of educational meaning. But because the real educational meaning of any curriculum is as variable as the specific context in which it will be used, the curriculum critic must leave the final judgment open. The task of the curriculum critic is to facilitate a judgment which will vary according to educational setting. The final judgment — of the value of a set of curriculum materials or of the manner in which they must be adapted or supplemented -- is ultimately up to the practitioner. The most that curriculum criticism can do is to disclose the salient aesthetic qualities of the work, allow aesthetic judgments, and provide the educational analysis which can facilitate practical judgment.

Curriculum criticism, when fully developed as a discipline or a tradition, may enable theoretical discourse about curriculum to connect directly with the practical. And it would, hopefully, be able to deal adequately with the qualities of curricula in use in classrooms, and enable curriculum practitioners to perceive qualities in the materials of their profession which the technical rationale does not reveal. But most of all from the point of view of the problems identified earlier in this paper, it may enable curriculum theorists to come closer to the practical nature of the subject-matter of their field. Hopefully we can begin to bridge the peculiarly persistent gap between theory and practice in the diverse discipline we call "curriculum".

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